

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Tuesday 4 June 2024
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 8.45 pm
Members Present:	Councillors R Baldwin (Chairman), E Barnard, R Bassett, M George, W Kauffman, J Lea, A Lion, J Lucas, M Markham, S Murray, S Rackham, G Wiskin and A Ardakani.		
Members Present (Virtually):	Councillors C McCann (Vice-Chairman)		
Other Councillors:	Councillors R Balcombe, L Morgan, S Patel, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse and K Williamson		
Apologies:	Councillors J Parsons and D Sunger		
Officers Present:	L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), A Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer), J Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), N Gambrill (Continuous Improvement Specialist), C Hartgrove (Interim Director Finance / Deputy 151 Officer (Shared Services)), P Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor).		
Officers Present (Virtually):	N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer) and T Larsen (Democratic Services Officer)		

[A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that Councillor Ardakani had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Rackham.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest as a non-executive director of Qualis.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. MATTERS ARISING AND OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

There were no matters or outstanding issues raised.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

7. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

8. COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, addressed the Committee and detailed a range of challenges faced by the Council and the priorities of the Council for the 2024/25.

The Council's priorities would be based around: keeping control of planning; improving issues around the housing estates; working with partners to address issues of concern to residents and improve Place, including the street scene; the creation of our own waste company; delivery of the new leisure centre in Epping; economic development and building on the opportunity afforded by the contract with Google, North Weald master plan and council owned commercial properties; building revenue streams to protect and enhance frontline services; the role and improved outcomes by Qualis; partnership working and shared services, building on our position as the lead in North Essex Councils and at the forefront of shared services; transformation of services; improvements in customer service and effective engagement with residents to show we are open for business.

It was highlighted that sound finances needed to underpin all activity, structural change and increasing reserves were essential, and effective engagement through Scrutiny would ensure the best outcomes for the district.

The Committee thanked and welcomed the presentation from The Leader, reaffirmed the constructive role that Scrutiny should have, and raised a series of queries and comments.

The Leader acknowledged that the digital switch would be challenging and would need to be addressed, suggested that the Place Fund would be used to improve pride in our place which would encompass and address fly tipping, parking on grass verges and similar behaviour, acknowledged food poverty in the district and the role of the Council to encourage aspiration and opportunity for our communities, and encouraged the scrutiny of Qualis outcomes and delivery, and wider transport issues.

Resolved:

The Corporate Priorities for the year 2024/25 were noted.

9. CORPORATE PLAN KEY OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS 2023/24 YEAR END REPORT

Nicki Gambrill provided an overview of the 2023/24 year-end update report which outlined performance against the Corporate Plan Objectives. The Committee were advised that the key performance indicators (KPI) were being reviewed to align with the corporate plan and fit for the future programme, and this would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and commented; that there needed to be a transitional plan for the Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) initiative at Debden Broadway; that public transport, especially in rural areas, could restrict access to health and well-being initiatives; and agreed that it was essential that scrutiny of the proposed KPI suite occurred.

The Committee were given assurance by officers that relevant services would attend the multi-agency hub and the Climate Change Action Plan would be presented to the Place Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee were advised that a response the queries raised regarding awareness of and usage electric vehicle charging points; statistics in relation to ASB at Limes Farm; the home upgrade grant phase 2; and clarity on the relationship between the appeal statistics for non-householder application and appeals on major decision would be provided after the meeting.

Resolved:

The Committee reviewed the Corporate Plan objectives and agreed acknowledges that this would inform and support the work programmes for Scrutiny in 2024/25.

Post meeting update: response to queries raised

- (i) *Electric Vehicles: EFDC receive landlord report data from EV charging provider, InstaVolt, which contains usage data and is commercially sensitive. Based on this data, it is officer view that the chargers are well used considering its recent launch late January 2024 and the car park occupancy levels. The data can be shared with Members for internal use upon request. The type of charges installed are ultra-rapid charging stations, with an average charge duration of 35 minutes. This is a significantly lower dwell time than standard charging stations and therefore may create a false impression that the chargers are not being used. InstaVolt is a leading EV charging supplier and use specific digital marketing strategies with third-party integration. EFDC have also issued social media posts regarding the installation of EV chargers and additional social media posts will be issued to promote the chargers further*
- (ii) *Home Upgrade grant, this is a niche grant for off-gas properties and there has been a targeted approach this includes:*
- *Mailouts to households thought to be eligible using data from Parity Projects to predict EPC rating, private tenure and off gas status (December 2023 and February 2024).*
 - *Banners put in some GP surgeries (based on proximity to automatically eligible postcodes) and the Civic.*

- Attendance of Stay Well events in the autumn and spring.
- Webpage information [Support with housing costs - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk)
- News release [Home Upgrade Grant launches - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk)
- Targeted social media in December
- Leaflets in various locations such as libraries, leisure centres, GP surgeries, food bank
- Information to partner organisations in public health who can refer potentially eligible residents

Based on activity so far EFDC have surpassed the referral target for 2023/24 and further promotional activities will take place over 2024/25.

(iii) *The impact on ASB from the football team in Limes Park had not been quantified.*

(iv) *Planning: (a) 76% non-householder applications were dismissed on appeal, this meant that the remainder (24%) were allowed in respect of all non-householder appeals. This categorisation includes major applications and those termed non-major category type applications. (b) the Council is not exceeding the 10% of appeals allowed as a percentage of all major planning application (which is a national measure),*

10. BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 4 (PROVISIONAL OUTTURN) 2023-24

The Chief Financial Officer, Chris Hartgrove, presented the Budget Monitoring report for quarter 4 of 2023/24 and confirmed that there had been no further amendments to the position before the publication of statement of accounts on 28 May 2024, and this report represented the outturn position for 2023/24 subject to external audit.

The report detailed the further improved position in the general fund for Quarter 4 with an outturn of £0.918 million surplus, the budget underspend and funding surplus combined to contribute to a balance of £5.095 million. This restored the Council's minimum contingency balance, allowed the creation of a capital risk reserve, and the delivery of the transformation revenue reserve as part of the 'fit for the future' programme. There was a significant shortfall in planning income, this had been addressed in the development of the 2024/25 budget, which included a more prudent expectation of income from planning.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recorded a surplus, the balance at year end was £4.797 million, more than double the adopted minimum contingency balance of £2.0 million. Slippage on the General Fund and HRA Capital Programmes was detailed, unspent funds would be rolled forward to 2024/25 to ensure completion of the underlying capital programmes.

The Committee raised several queries and were provided with a detailed description in relation to housing benefits overpayments, specific reserve funds, and average age of sundry debts. The Committee requested clarity around the names and nature of the specific reserves. Officers acknowledged some of the reserves were historic and a review would be carried out to ensure transparency and advised that a data cleansing exercise was being carried in relation to sundry debt.

The Committee challenged the spend on voids and acknowledged this spend was from the HRA. They were advised that a void relet standard, new service level agreement and pre-void inspection would support the management of spend on voids. There would be an opportunity for further detailed discussion at a future Communities Scrutiny meeting.

Resolved:

The Committee noted:

1. The General Fund revenue position at the end of Quarter 4 (Provisional Outturn) for 2023/24
2. The General Fund capital position at the end of Quarter 4 (Provisional Outturn) for 2023/24
3. The Housing Revenue Account revenue position at the end of Quarter 4 (Provisional Outturn) for 2023/24
4. The Housing Revenue Account capital position at the end of Quarter 4 (Provisional Outturn) for 2023/24 be noted; *and*
5. The Movements on Reserves to create additional reserves earmarked for the mitigation of risk (“Capital Investment Risk Reserve”) and the funding of corporate priorities (“Transformation Revenue Reserve”).

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman advised the Committee that there was a correction to the work programme, items C1 Annual Housing Performance and C2 Tenant Satisfaction Measures, would only be presented to the Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee

- discussed the work programme and acknowledged the balance of items between the three Scrutiny Committees and the single item meetings, and
- suggested it was essential that TfL were invited to Scrutiny to address concerns re the Central Line and that consideration be given to included bus services in the sustainable transport single item meeting.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the work programme for the municipal year 2024/25.

12. CABINET BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed the Cabinet’s current programme of key decisions, dated 29 April 2024, and noted that this Forward Plan preceded the new Cabinet structure for 2024/25. There were no additional matters identified for inclusion on the Overview & Scrutiny work programme

The Committee requested that details of the responsibilities of Portfolio Holders be made available as soon as possible.

The Committee suggested that early member input was essential to ensure an effective review of the polling districts.

Resolved:

That the Cabinet’s current programme of key decisions, dated 29 April 2024, be noted.

CHAIRMAN